

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6112

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRASILIA 8032

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, BR

SUBJECT: CHICO PINTO SILENCED

REF: BRASILIA 7956

SUMMARY: REACTION TO A HARD-HITTING MANIFESTO ISSUED BY PINTO RESULTED IN HIS BEING BLOCKED FROM FORMALLY DELIVERING A FAREWELL ADDRESS IN THE CONGRESS. HE THEN DELIVERED IT INFORMALLY, AFTER WHICH, WHILE POLICE SCURRIED TO PREVENT HIS TAKING REFUGE IN A FOREIGN EMBASSY, HE PREPARED TO DELIVER HIMSELF TO PRISON. WHILE THE GOVERNMENT'S TOUGH REACTION LEFT THE IMAGES OF THE CONGRESS IN GENERAL AND CHAMBER MAJORITY LEADER CELIO BORJA IN PARTICULAR MORE TARNISHED THEN EVER, ITS EFFORTS TO SUPPRESS THE INCIDENT SEEMED LIKELY TO PREVAIL. END SUMMARY.

1. CHARACTERISTICALLY DETERMINED TO SEE HIS POLITICAL CAREER END, IF ONLY TEMPRARILY, WITH A BANG, MAVERICK OPPOSITION DEPUTY FRANCISCO "CHICO" PINTO ISSUED A MANIFESTO (APPARENTLY ON OCTOBER 15) BEGINNING "EN ROUTE TO JAIL" AND ENDING WITH A PROMISE TO CONTINUE THE STRUGGLE. IN BETWEEN, HE DEFENDED BOTH THE ACCURACY OF HIS REMARKS ON
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CHILE AND HIS RIGHT TO SAY THEM, AND SLAMMED

EVERYTHING FROM THE EXCEPTIONAL MEASURES THROUGH PRESS CENSORSHIP TO THE "DENATIONALIZATION OF THE BRAZILIAN ECONOMY," THE TRANS-AMAZONIC HIGHWAY, AND THE RIO-NITEROI BRIDGE. THE MANIFESTO WAS, OF COURSE, SUPPRESSED, ALTHOUGH COPIES CIRCULATED IN POLITICAL AND JOURNALISTIC CIRCLES.

2. SCHEDULED TO DELIVER A FAREWELL ADDRESS IN THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES THE FOLLOWING DAY, PINTO SAW THE OCCASION POSTPONED ONE DAY THROUGH AGREEMENT BETWEEN MDB PRESIDENT ULYSSES GUIMARAES ON THE ONE HAND AND MAJORITY LEADER CELIO BORJA AND CHAMBER PRESIDENT FLAVIO MARCILIO ON THE OTHER. REPORTEDLY, THE GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP WAS CONCERNED BECAUSE PRESIDENT GEISEL WAS TO BE AT THE CONGRESS THAT DAY FOR THE UNVEILING THERE OF THE FIRST BRAZILIAN-MADE FORMULA 1 RACING CAR. ACCORDING TO MDB AND PRESS SOURCES, THE AGREEMENT STIPULATED THAT PINTO COULD SPEAK THE FOLLOWING DAY (OCTOBER 17), AND PINTO WAS INSCRIBED TO SPEAK DURING THE MAJOR PORTION OF THE AFTERNOON SESSION.

3. SUBSEQUENTLY, ACCORDING TO A WELL-CONNECTED JOURNALIST, JUSTICE MINISTER FALCAO PHONED MARCILIO AND, CITING A "TERRIFIC" REACTION WITHIN MILITARY CIRCLES, ORDERED MARCILIO NOT TO LET PINTO SPEAK ON PAIN OF THE CONGRESS' BEING CLOSED THAT VERY DAY. MARCILIO'S PROTESTS THAT A COMMITMENT HAD ALREADY BEEN MADE WERE TO NO AVAIL.

4. ACCORDINGLY, BORJA TOOK THE FLOOR THE FOLLOWING DAY ON A POINT OF ORDER TO NOTE THAT PINTO WAS INSCRIBED, AND WENT ON TO READ EXCERPTS FROM THE CONSTITUTION AND THE HOUSE RULES OF THE CHAMBER. THE FORMER (ARTICLE 149, SEE REFTTEL) HAD TO DO WITH THE LOSS OF POLITICAL RIGHTS, AND THE LATTER RULED THE IMMEDIATE LOSS OF MANDATE OF ANY DEPUTY LOSING HIS POLITICAL RIGHTS. THUS, SAID BORJA, PINTO COULD NOT SPEAK.

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5. MINORITY LEADER LAERTE FIEIRA IMMEDIATELY PROTESTED, NOTING THAT THE CHAMBER HAD NOT YET RECEIVED OFFICIAL NOTICE OF PINTO'S CONDEMNATION AND ASSERTING THAT THE CHAMBER THUS COULD NOT YET ACT AGAINST HIM. CHAMBER PRESIDENT MARCILIO RESPONDED THAT (PINTO'S COLLEAGUE IN THE MDB'S AUTENTICO WING) DEPUTY LYSANEAS MACIEL HAD NOTED THE FACT OF PINTO'S CONDEMNATION IN A STATEMENT BEFORE THE CHAMBER, AND

THUS THE CHAMBER WAS FORMALLY AWARE OF THE COURT ACTION. LAERTE VIEIRA, GUIMARAES, AND MACIAL PROTESTED, BUT MARCILIO PROCEEDED TO WRAP UP ROUTINE CHAMBER BUSINESS AND DECLARED THE SESSION CLOSED.

6. BBORJA; (WHO SUBSEQUENTLY WAS ITED BY VARIOUS SOURCES AS HAVING SAID THAT HE BLOCKED PINTO FROM SPEAKING IN ORDER TO KEEP THE CONGRESS ITSELF FROM BEING CLOSED,) TRIED TO MAKE AMENDS TO PINTO, WHO HAD BEEN STANDING ALL THIS TIME BEFORE A DEAD MICROPHONE, AND WHO REBUFFED HIM SHARPLY. THE PUBLIC WAS THEN CLEARED FROM THE GALLERY, ALL MICROPHONE WERE TURNED OFF, AND IN THAT DRAMATIC IF HIGHLY RESTRICTED CIRCUMSTANCE, CHICO PINTO READ HIS SPEECH.

7. WHEN HE HAD COMPLETED THE TWO-HOUR SPEECH, A VIGOROUS DEFENSE OF HIS OWN ACTIONS AND A SHARP ATTACK ON THE SYSTEM (TORTURE, SUPPRESSION OF FREEDOM, ETC.), PROMISING AGAIN TO CONTINUE THE STRUGGLE, HE REPAIRED TO THE CHAMBER'S MEDICAL UNIT, WHERE HE WAS EXAMINED AND OBTAINED TWO COPIES OF A MEDICAL REPORT SHOWING THAT HE WAS IN GOOD HEALTH AND UNMARKED BY BRUISES OR ABRASIONS OF ANY SORT.

8. IN THE MEANTIME, RUMORS SPREAD TO THE EFFECT THAT HE WAS BEING SOUGHT BY THE FEDERAL POLICE, WHO THOUGHT HE MIGHT ATTEMPT TO TAKE REFUGE IN SOME FOREIGN EMBASSY. (IN FACT, A FEDERAL POLICE-MAN DID STATION HIMSELF IN THE ENTRYWAY TO OUR CHANCERY, SUBMACHINE GUN AT HAND, TO WAIT FOR CHICO PINTO, BUT HE ACCEDED IMMEDIATELY TO OUR CONFIDENTIAL

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REQUEST THAT HE REMOVE HIMSELF, TAKING UP A POSITION IN THE RAIN OUTSIDE THE ENCLOSING FENCE BEFORE, SHORTLY THEREAFTER, DEPARTING. WE UNDERSTAND THAT "UNUSUAL MEASURES" WERE ALSO TAKEN AT OTHER EMBASSIES.) AT THE SAME TIME, CENSORS WERE GIVING THE WORD TO THE MEDIA: ANY MENTION OF CHICO PINTO WAS FORBIDDEN.

9. COMMENT: IN THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH, PINTO'S FELLOW AUTENTICOS WERE PREPARING TO TAKE UP THE CAUSE. OTHERS, INCLUDING FORMER AUTENTICO, DEPUTY ALCEU COLLARES, WERE SKEPTICAL, HOWEVER, THAT MUCH WOULD RESULT FROM THE EPISODE, ESPECIALLY IN VIEW OF THE GOVERNMENT'S DETERMINATION TO SQUASH IT. ONE NEWSPAPER EDITOR TOLD US THAT IN REACTION TO

A CENSOR'S FIGURATIVE DECLARATION THAT "CHICO PINTO JUST DIED," HE CONSIDERED RUNNING A MOCK OBITUARY, BUT DECIDED AGAINST IT. SUCH PRUDENCE SEEMS LIKELY TO PREVAIL. END COMMENT.

10. TAKING NO CHANCES, BORJA ABRUPTLY DECLARED THE CONGRESS IN RECESS UNTIL AFTER THE (NOVEMBER 15) ELECTIONS. HIS PUBLICLY ATTRIBUTED STATEMENT THAT A SELF-POLICED CONGRESS IS BETTER THAN ONE POLICED FROM OUTSIDE, HOWEVER, DID NOT GO UNANSWERED: REPORTED PRESTIGIOUS COLUMNIST CARLOS CASTELLO BRANCO (QUOTING ELDER STATESMAN ALFONSO ARINOS DE MELLO FRANCO,) "IT IS BETTER TO CLOSE AN OPEN CONGRESS THAN TO KEEP OPEN A CLOSED ONE."
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